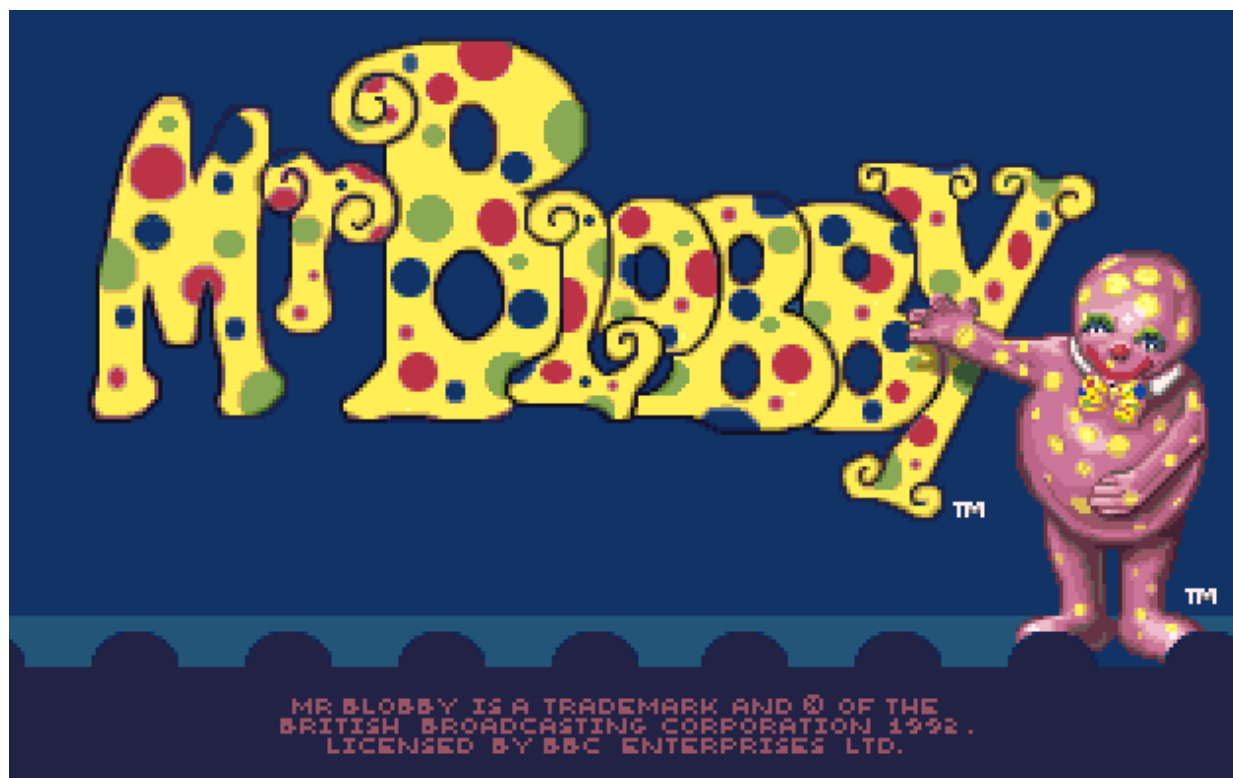


More fun than a barrel of monkeys

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

Believe it or not 'platform-painter' is practically a genre in itself where the Amiga is concerned. There are literally, erm... *several* games out in the red and white checkered prairie of Boingsville that impinge on the existence of Konami's 1981 arcade coin-op, Amidar. Titles where the goal is to trundle across a 2D landscape or grid, re-decorating - or otherwise *altering* - the composition of the ledges you walk, run or roll across. While Mr Blobby is undoubtedly the pinnacle of exemplars, CarVup crosses the finish line a close second.



At its nucleus CarVup is a remake of Jaleco's 1985 coin-op title, City Connection; a game in which you're tasked with navigating through various locations around the globe, avoiding police, cats, and spikes, whilst re-painting the platforms white and collecting oil from the comfort of your '81 Honda City hatchback. Proving that product placement was nothing new when Zool took his first suck of a Chupa Chups lolly. Actually I have no idea if any money changed hands between Honda and Jaleco.



Maybe one of the developers just thought the City model would appeal to the same audience who embraced Herbie the VW Beetle (aka the Love Bug), so chose to adopt it sans any sponsorship deal.

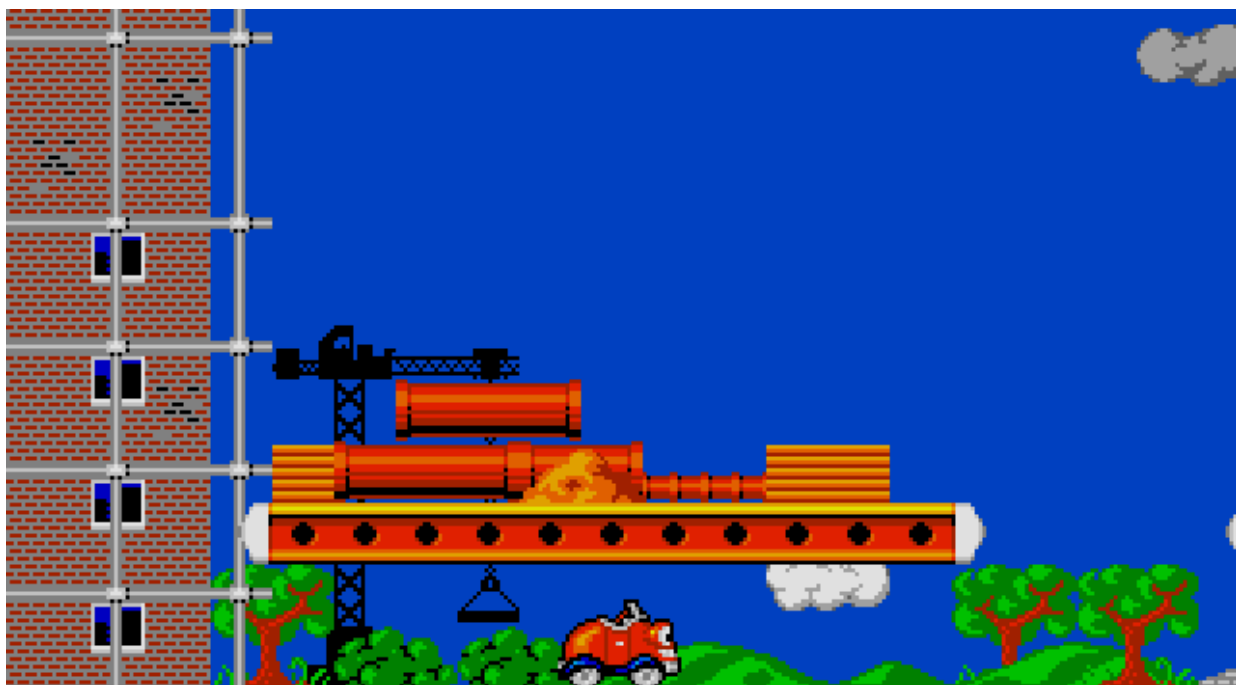
In the original Japanese version you play as a blue-haired girl called Clarice (aka Kurarisu) whose objective is to track down her ideal man, and hand over her gift-wrapped heart... metaphorically speaking. Harbours a plot sufficient to melt the Bechdel test, today the sexism battle cries would be loud enough to make Donald Trump's teeth rattle!

Possibly even back then; by the time the game was exported to North America, Clarice had morphed into an anonymous bloke called... "we'll hash out the finer details later", the developers probably thought, and then forgot.

In November 1990, following a six-month development cycle, Core Design's homage was unveiled. Although never officially associated with Jaleco's game, it's hard to imagine this wasn't the driving force. CarVup was coded by Rob Toone and

illustrated by Terry Lloyd, while Matthew Simmonds (4Mat) is credited with composing the music. Even though there *isn't* any in the Amiga version, only sound effects. You have to play the Atari ST original to experience that; the trade-off is the absence of sound effects, so it's all swings and roundabouts.

Accordingly, Terry designed all the graphics with *Atari* bitmap editors; the sprites using Art Studio and DEGAS Elite (Design & Entertainment Graphic Arts System) for the title screens and backgrounds. He clearly knew his way around each - CarVup is as charmingly charismatic today as it was nearly three decades ago. Rather than duplicate the functional, straight-laced visuals of City Connection, Terry took inspiration from Rainbow Islands and Rodland, which explains why CarVup is so colourful, cutesy and endearingly eccentric.



I'm sure by now you'll have stopped to ask yourself why we should be so preoccupied with the hue and composition of platforms. How does the plot - if there *is* one - explain this

incessant tinkering? Let's see if the manual can provide any clues...

"Cartoon World, a place normally overflowing with niceness is being done in by the bad guys. These nasty toons are led by the most horrible toon ever, Borgus Grim. He's run riot through the eight lands of Cartoon World and removed the goodness. Not only that but he has kidnapped your best buddies, filled the place with looney toons and then installed himself as an end of game adversary.

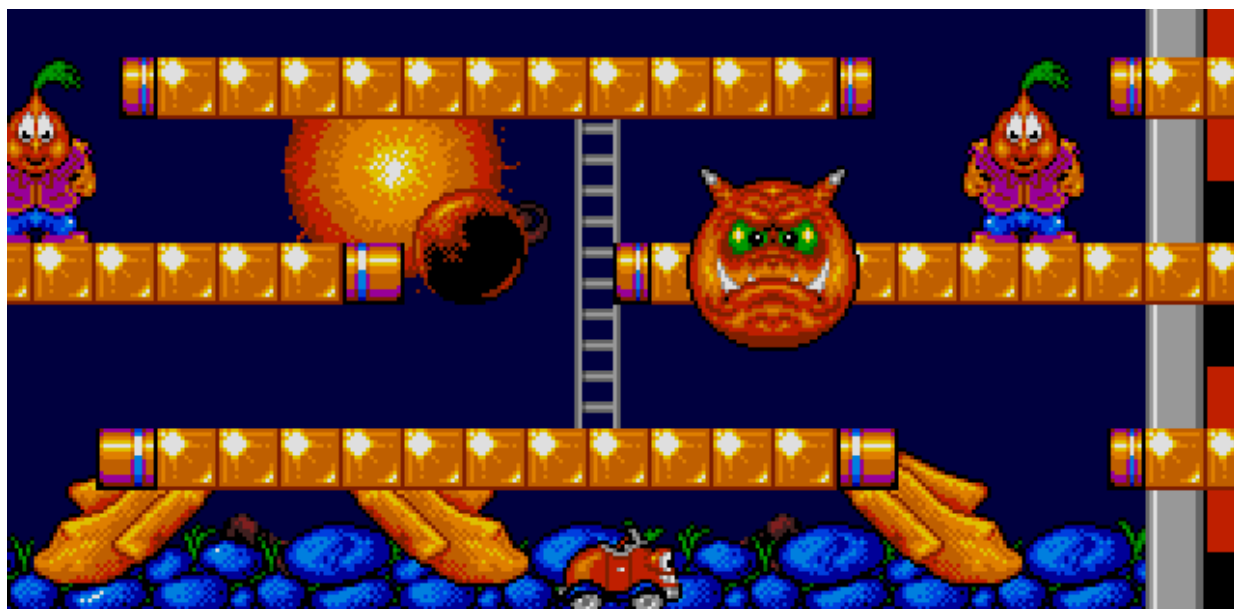
Thank goodness for Carl, a jolly friendly car. The only way Cartoon World can be saved is for Carl to visit all eight lands in Cartoon World, and drive all over the bad areas turning them into good. You know when an area has been turned good because the hollow platform is filled in."



Carl? Who's Carl? According to the box blurb and in-game story our 'Chugga-Boom' car is called Arnie. It appears to have been modelled on The Ant Hill Mob's vehicle as

featured in The Perils of Penelope Pitstop... well, if you drove under a low bridge and it sliced the top clean off. So more like the Chitty Chitty Bang Bang car then... or Benny the Cab from Roger Rabbit. Oh, it's like *lots* of famous cars. Take your pick.

Likewise, somewhere along the way our arch-nemesis, Borgus Grim, inexplicably became *Captain* Grim. You'll have to wait until you reach the finale to discover he's a kind of cross between a space hopper and a Cacodemon, the villainous levitating cyclops monster from the Doom series.



That, however, is a good way off yet. Before we encounter the game's one and only end-of-level guardian we have a tonne of platforms to paint, repair, clean or otherwise modify in some way. On the construction site level we must first replace all the rivets in the girders, then in the following level paint them red. Elsewhere we have to iron out the 'wrinkles' in similar girders, re-insert ribs in spine bones to conquer the Jurassic world, clean blood off platforms in the horror-themed level, and mow the grass in the garden stage.



Controls consist of pushing left or right to switch direction, fire to jump and the space bar to activate any special weapons acquired. If you hold down the fire button for a few seconds it's possible to jump higher than normal, eschewing the demand for pixel-perfect leaping.

Unusually for a platformer, Arnie continues travelling along his current path until you intervene by pushing the joystick in the opposite direction. Also automated is your response upon reaching the end of a platform; unless you jump just before hitting the edge, your car flips around 180 degrees and veers off towards the other side, much like one of those wall rebounding toy cars that were popular around the same time CarVup emerged.

You're allocated multiple lives, though Arnie has no energy bar to gradually deplete - one hit and it's goodnight Vienna. Exacerbating the situation he's up against the clock. Take too long to transform all the platforms and Turbo the flying demon rears his ugly mush to stalk you. He's the equivalent

of the 'hurry up' menace in Rainbow Islands, Flood, Parasol Stars, and so on.

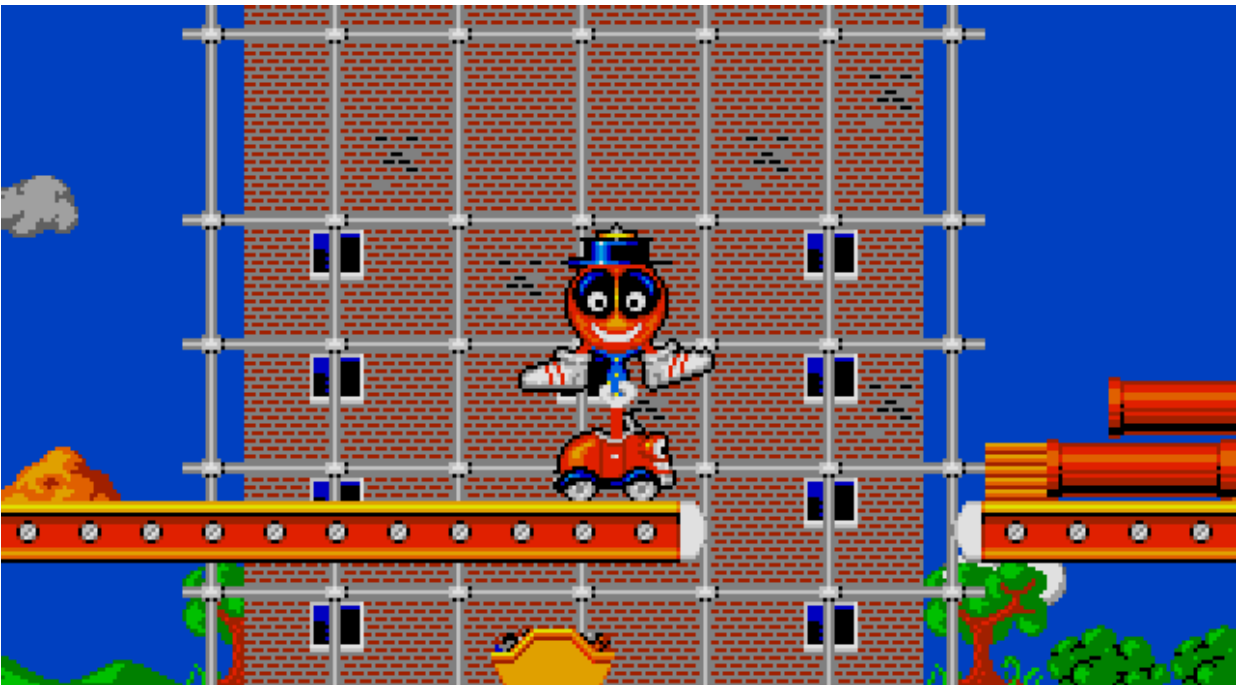


Also analogous to Rainbow Islands, you collect letters to spell words like BONUS and EXTRA to enter point-gathering bonus stages or accrue additional lives respectively. It probably won't come as much of a surprise to learn that it's raining fruit you catch during the baddie-less bonus stages.

Arnie (or whoever we are) begins the game unarmed, though can scavenge a number of useful power-ups. You can lob smart bombs with your retractable arm, take advantage of oil slicks, smoke screens, a gun, baddie-freezing snowflakes and a carrot metamorphosis gizmo that turns all aliens into big bonuses.



Each time we complete one of the 40 levels we're whisked away to the next by an especially cheerful helicopter. Plonked down on solid ground we're released to repeat the process with no new gameplay mechanics introduced to maintain a sense of progression and variety.

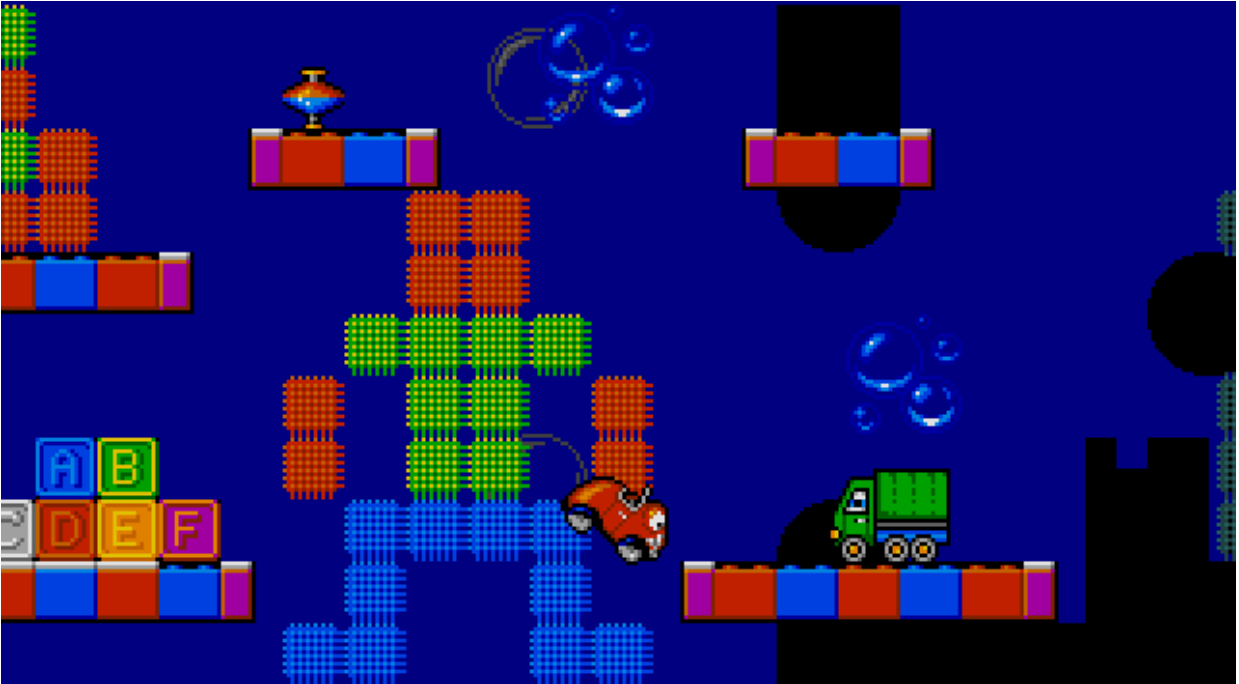


What *does* change between stages aside from the theme is the type of adversaries encountered, including a number of interesting Easter eggs in the guise of classic gaming and TV entities. You'll find Qbert in the wild west environment, Pacman ghosts on the horror level, Asteroid debris in the garden, and Space Invaders and Flintstones houses and cars in Jurassic land.



For added nostalgia, there are Rubik's cubes in toy land, though lucky for us we're not tasked with solving the puzzle. At school, I tended to approach the conundrum by leaving mine at home at the back of a dusty drawer, and instead doing something infinitely more productive. Like kicking a rolled-up pair of socks around the playground... we weren't allowed real footballs in junior school because the pitch was surrounded by windows, and naturally, they were made of glass.

Anyone remember Sticklebricks? You know, Lego's poor relation? Well, either way, you'll find some here.



If you're more of an Addams Family fan I'm sure you'll get a kick out of running into Thing. You'd think that would be handy in some way, only he kills you just the same as any other pest.

Far more off-the-wall, however, are the harpies flying around with their bare, naked boobies hanging out! I was shocked and appalled to the core to witness that in a kid's game. In fact, I'll be sure to write to the ombudsman of video gaming to lodge a formal complaint. ;)



Every so often we get to rescue one of our captive chums who rewards us with a cheesy grin and even cheesier thank you message. Only when they are all emancipated do we face their tormentor, who splits into several mini space hoppers upon defeat, before skulking off to lick its wounds.





Making the entire exercise pointless, the game loops back to the beginning following an exasperated cry of, "Ere what's goin on? Oh no, not again". While we come to terms with this inconvenient turn of events, a microphone on legs chases across the screen what appears to be a metallic plaster, also with legs. Confirming who was behind this Monty Python-esque madness, digitised pictures of the developers surface, and we're left to wonder, erm... well, lots of things really. It's hard to know where to start.



Obviously entirely derivative what with being a remake, CarVup still somehow manages to feel fresh, a break from the norm. Arnie's not entirely under our control, control system, and the additional challenge of having to reach every nook and cranny before progressing, certainly contribute to this perception. As long as you play only in short bursts and keep in mind CarVup is aimed at very young youngsters, it's a fun diversion from the torment of real-world commuting.

